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ABSTRACT

After a decision was made at a Texas elementary school to adopt a whole language philosophy toward literacy instruction, a study was designed to address three research questions: (1) What levels of concerns are raised by teachers in the areas of "self," "task," and "impact"? (2) What responses do these concerns elicit from university researchers and other participants? and (3) What changes occurred among participants during their involvement in the initial phase of this project? Data sources included: audio tapes of weekly inservices with 2 university researchers, 23 teachers, and the school principal; teacher journals; participant responses to questionnaires; field notes of classroom observations; and collaborative interactions with teachers. Initial inservices were designed to help participants identify current practices in order to facilitate their assimilation of new knowledge at later stages of the program. Activities promoting individual reflection and talk among teachers provided opportunities for new understandings and beliefs to be confirmed or rejected, with the eventual goal of establishing a common knowledge base. Other inservice meetings were designed to guide individual exploration into whole language instruction, to identify instructional themes/topics and accompanying children's literature by grade levels, and to provide an opportunity for participants to report on the themes and supporting literature they had compiled. In their journals, essays, concern surveys, and conversations, the voices of teachers confirmed the efficacy of the following change factors: change is a process, not an event; change is a highly personal experience; change involves developmental growth; and change is best understood as it directly affects classroom practice, students and preparation time. (One figure is included and nine references are attached.) (MG)

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Exploring New Directions for Staff Development: Teachers in Charge of Change

The purpose of this paper is to describe the results of the initial phase of a long-term inservice program aimed at restructuring one elementary school's literacy program. It focuses on observed changes that occurred when teachers became active participants during inservice sessions based upon effective change principles.

Fannin Elementary School in Grand Prairie, Texas, is a multi-ethnic, urban elementary school situated in a neighborhood changing from lower middle socioeconomic status to low socioeconomic status. Nearly 70% of the children enrolled in the school qualify for free or reduced lunch. At least half of the population is non-English speaking and comprised of first generation immigrants from Latin America and Mexico. Clearly, a majority of the students in this school are "at risk."

Urban schools are increasingly faced with problems of literacy instruction. During the past two years, informal discussions among the Fannin principal, teachers and other district personnel had focused on whole language approaches to literacy instruction for meeting the changing needs of Fannin's student population. Traditional skills-based instruction was proving inadequate in meeting the needs of these students.

Teale (1978) and Goodman (1986) suggest that reading and writing are processes for making sense out of and through written language. Literacy is accomplished through the internalization

of social interaction and the exploration of these written materials. Meaning, rather than isolated skills, is emphasized, allowing students to be actively involved and enthusiastic about learning. Mindful of these ideas, the principal and teachers were in agreement: Adopting a whole language philosophy toward literacy instruction, schoolwide, held the greatest promise for eventual success. After consultation with two university researchers, the "Whole Language Collaboration Project" was established to affect educational change. In December, 1989, this study of learning, language, teaching and curriculum, was initiated at Fannin Elementary School.

Methods and Procedures

This study was designed to address three research questions: (a) What levels of concerns are raised by teachers in the areas of "Self," "Task," and "Impact?" (b) What responses do these concerns elicit from university researchers and other participants? and; (c) What changes occurred among participants during their involvement in the initial phase of this project? Data sources included audio tapes of weekly inservices, teacher journals, participant responses to questionnaires, fieldnotes of classroom observations and collaborative interactions with teachers.

From December 13, 1989, through May 3, 1990, fourteen forty-five to sixty minute inservices were conducted with university researchers, twenty-three teachers and the school principal for the following purposes: (a) To identify what teachers and

administrators did at that time to promote literacy in their school; (b) To identify what, according to the research, whole language teachers do to promote literacy among students; (c) To identify aspects of whole language literacy instruction to explore and put into practice in this school; (d) To provide in-depth study/discussion groups to strengthen each member's knowledge of the aspects of whole language, so that individual, grade level and whole school goals could be set, and; (e) To establish collegial relations between university, district and school personnel.

Teacher/staff participation was voluntary throughout the project. All teachers, with the exception of the Music and P.E. teachers chose to participate. In addition to the weekly inservices, the university researchers spent two half-days per week observing in classrooms to strengthen relations and to gain a true picture of what went on in each teacher's classroom, in order that a better understanding of the educational community as a whole could be obtained.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978) was employed to develop theory about how collaborative efforts between university and public school researchers affected change. Key points and recurring events were used to develop categories that described change in participants. Additional incidents or evidences of these categories were searched for and described. The information and relationships obtained from the categories

were used to develop theory about the change factors involved in this collaborative project.

The Program

Documenting Current Practices/Beliefs: Inservice sessions 1-5

Initial inservices were designed to help participants identify current practices in order to facilitate their assimilation or accommodation of new knowledge at later stages of the program. During these sessions, participants identified, through writing in personal journals, what they did at that time to facilitate literacy development in their classrooms. Accompanying reflections and follow-up discussions resulted in the compilation of lists of current instructional practices at individual, grade and school-wide levels.

During the first inservice session, teachers completed the Stages of Concern Survey (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin & Hall, 1987). This instrument focuses on the concerns of individuals involved in change and is based on research identifying three categories of concerns: Self, Task and Impact. According to Hord et al., "When a change effort is in its early stages, teachers are very likely to have "Self-concerns." They will want to know more about the innovation [whole language], what it is and how it is similar to and different from what they are already doing" (p. 31). Such concerns dictate the need to "...help teachers see how the innovation relates to their current practices, both in regard to similarities and differences" (p. 44).

"Task concerns" tend to become more intense as participants begin to implement the innovation and during its early use. Examples of such concerns include use of time, classroom management and instructional materials. When participants become comfortable with an innovation, concerns shift to "Impact" on students, relations with colleagues and administration, and improving the effectiveness of the program.

Establishing a Knowledge Base: Inservice sessions 5-8

The teachers' initial expectations for this program were that the university researchers would conduct weekly "how to do Whole Language" sessions. They wanted to learn the strategies immediately so they could quickly become whole language teachers. The university researchers knew that change takes time, and in order for teachers to become whole language teachers and for this school to become a whole language school, a common knowledge base had to be established among all participants. Whole language literacy instruction, a "philosophy of curriculum, of learning, of teaching, and of language" (Goodman, 1986, p. 69), was studied carefully and internalized by all participants.

The university researchers wanted to be assured that each participant was in control of her personal development as well as the development of the group as a whole. Therefore, activities promoting individual reflection and "talk" among teachers provided opportunities for new understandings and beliefs to be confirmed or rejected, so that a common knowledge base could be established by all. Each teacher's voice was unique and

important; each was at a different level in the process of learning about whole language.

Beginning with the fifth session, the teachers were guided through What's Whole in Whole Language? (Goodman, 1986), a book that describes the essence of the whole language movement. "Whole language: not without a whole language teacher," the closing chapter in the book, was selected for initial study. This chapter discusses how a whole language teacher approaches literacy instruction. Participants' current beliefs and practices had been documented in earlier inservices. Therefore, information obtained from study of this chapter provided a means for each teacher to assess her current status in terms of an ideal. According to Hord et al. (1987), "Change will be most successful when its support is geared to the diagnosed needs of the individual users. If change is highly personal, then clearly different responses and interventions will be required for different individuals. Paying attention to each individual's progress can enhance the improvement process" (p. 6).

Upon completion of Goodman's book, additional resources (Goodman, 1986; Canady, 1980; Newman, 1990; Ridley, 1990) were explored to further develop psycholinguistic theory and whole language literacy instruction. In her discussion of whole language and whole language teachers, Newman (1990) states, "It requires that we engage in reexamination of our beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching, and about using language to learn about the world" (p. 4). Emphasis in sessions now

shifted from the personal and concrete to the abstract and theoretical.

During session eight, the Stages of Concern Survey was administered a second time. In addition, participants were asked to provide a written response to the following question: Where are you now in relation to whole language/psycholinguistic theory? Responses demonstrated varying levels of understanding about whole language and its applications for the classroom.

> I was thinking about how important it is to keep learning and restructuring what we need to know and what we already know. I need more input on implementation, resources available and how to be accountable for what the students know (Fourth grade teacher, 3-90).
>
> Hearing about it and seeing it in action are two different things. Tell me how, I might try it and flounder. Show me and I might understand it and use it with more confidence (Second grade teacher, 3-90).

Planning for Instruction: Inservice sessions 8-14

Participants' articulation of their status as whole language teachers resulted in a change in the format of remaining inservices. Grade level meetings, facilitated by the university researchers, replaced previous, school-wide sessions directed by these researchers. The purposes of these meetings were: (a) To guide individual explorations into whole language instruction, and; (b) To identify instructional themes/topics and accompanying

children's literature by grade levels for the upcoming school year. The final inservice provided an opportunity for participants at each grade level to report on the themes and supporting literature they had compiled. All participants discussed the materials in regard to student interests, appropriateness for grade level, curriculum, quality of materials, integration across content areas and balance among genre. This discussion resulted in a school-wide plan to guide literacy instruction for the 1990-91 school year.

On August 23, 1990, a four-hour staff development session was held with the participants of Fannin's "Whole Language Collaboration Project." During the course of this session, the "Stages of Concern" survey was administered for a third time.

Participants were also asked to reflect upon their previous involvement in the program. They responded, in writing, to the following prompt: "Enacting change in Fannin Elementary: Implementing a whole language perspective." The following excerpts from one teacher's essay are suggestive of the change occurring at Fannin:

> During the 1989-90 school year a major change <u>began</u> in the lives of about 30 teachers and 400 children. It started slowly and began snowballing as the months went on. The first meeting about implementing whole language into our classrooms was quiet and very "administrative". All of the teachers sat quietly and listened to people talking about theories, literature,

tape recorders and journals. It was overwhelming for the teachers... There were a handful of very enthusiastic teachers, but the rest were apprehensive; understandably... It was actually a gradual process for most of the staff, but in the Spring other teachers began asking for help; for ideas. And they began offering them too. It was a great thing that was starting to happen!!

Changing a "traditional" classroom into a "whole language" classroom is a slow, gradual process. But at Fannin Elementary it is happening. You can see it in the halls --lots of terrific work is displayed... And you can see change in the children. They are successful and they feel success. (I'm writing faster now because I'm excited just thinking about all of this.) And the teachers have changed. They are more receptive, open to new ideas. And they want to understand this thing called "whole language." Fannin is changing. And it's a very exciting time around here!!! (First grade teacher, 8-23-90)

Findings

Researchers have identified factors associated with change in school programs (Oakes, Hare & Sirotnik, 1986; Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin & Hall, 1987; Henke, 1988). University researchers were aware of these factors, designed inservices, and conducted individual and small group conferences that modeled

these principles. In their journals, essays, concern surveys, and conversations, the voices of teachers confirmed the efficacy of the following change factors:

Change is a process, not an event.

Those who do not understand the complexities of change tend to equate it with handing over a new program, an event. Instead, change must be viewed as a process occurring over time, usually a period of several years. Initially, teachers involved in the "Whole Language Collaboration Project" expected to become whole language teachers in a short period of time. The university researchers consistently emphasized that lasting change occurs gradually. The following comments represent one teacher's evolving perceptions of what change involves:

> At Fannin we are enacting a change... We are implementing change gradually. Some teachers who were trained in whole language could implement this process more actively than those who resisted change. Slowly, ever so slowly, some more were converted over to at least trying the whole language approach (Fourth grade teacher, 8-90).

Change is a highly personal experience.

Individuals altering their instructional philosophies differ in their reactions to the change process. University researchers routinely documented each participant's concerns. Consequently, ongoing interactions could better support individual development. The following comments represent the uniqueness of each

individual's personal experience in the program:

> I am experimenting lots more... I know that I always have questions at the end of the day. That is something I didn't do in past. I go home and reflect on the day and think about what worked, what the kids liked, etc. I guess I go home at night and "tinker" with my thoughts (First grade teacher, 3-90).
>
> I feel I have not gotten the hang of it at all. I feel I don't know where to go to at this point... I get frustrated not having it all outlined for me. On the other hand, I feel that my language arts lessons are more exciting. The children are more excited about reading. I've gotten to know how my students think (Fourth grade teacher, 3-90).

Change involves developmental growth.

Individuals involved in change programs exhibit different feelings, skills and attitudes toward the innovation as they become better acquainted with the new information. The Stages of Concern Survey was administered to the participants in this study on three separate occasions: January, March and August. Survey results document concerns in the areas of Self, Task and Impact. Profiles representing concerns of all participants at each administration are displayed in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Throughout the program, "Self" and "Task" concerns remained higher than "Impact" concerns and this is consistent with findings reported in the literature concerning change processes (Nelson, Pryor & Church, 1990; Roettger, 1990; Hord et al., 1987).

Change is best understood as it directly affects classroom practice, students and preparation time.

According to Hord et al. (1987), "teachers and others will naturally relate to change or improvement in terms of what it will mean to them or how it will affect their current classroom practice" (p. 45). Fannin teachers frequently raised issues regarding students' attitudes and behaviors as well as the preparation time involved in implementing whole language. University researchers worked with teachers through individual and small group conferences to support teacher change efforts. Such efforts are reflected in the following journal excerpt:

> Last year was a year of change for Fannin Elementary and anyone coming into the building could see it. On the outside walls of each classroom were the writings, stories and thoughts of children being introduced to the whole language approach. They [Kindergarten teachers] were excited about planning and integrating literature in all parts of their curriculum. They found that through the whole language approach their planning time was cut in half and their creative nature was nurtured by developing thematic centers for their

classroom.

> ...one bilingual kindergarten teacher noticed that the children asked more questions and started to use English more naturally and quickly than she had seen in her previous years of teaching. (Bilingual Kindergarten teacher, 8-23-90).

Discussion

The "Whole Language Collaboration Project" was carefully designed to facilitate the change process at Fannin Elementary School. Building trust among participants was the foundation of this change effort. Interactions with teachers were consciously planned to contribute to an ever-increasing level of trust as teachers maintained control of: (a) Their classrooms; (b) Interactions with the university researchers, and; (c) Continued participation in this project. Gradually, teachers came to accept the university researchers as part of the Fannin community.

It is apparent that change is occurring at Fannin. The university researchers were aware of the importance of the following requisite behaviors in facilitating change: Committing time to the project, meeting individual needs and maintaining administrative support. Time commitment required one and one half days per week in the school setting. During that time, university researchers made weekly classroom visits, were available for individual and small group consultation, and conducted weekly scheduled inservices.

Individual needs were addressed through spontaneous conversations in the hallways, in addition to scheduled conferences. Unscheduled conferences, lasting only several minutes to an hour, addressed teachers' immediate classroom concerns. Scheduled conferences were more pedagogical in nature; teachers arrived with notebooks containing prepared questions. Administrative support, at both the school and district levels, promoted this ongoing communication between university researchers and teachers. Therefore, university researchers maintained this support through periodic reports concerning the progress of the "Whole Language Collaboration Project."

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Figure 1 Stages of Concern

Summary Profile of All Participants at Three Administrations